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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [KU](#)
SUBJECT: PM URGES ENGAGEMENT WITH IRAN, SYRIA; CALLS FOR
RETURN OF GUANTANAMO DETAINEES

REF: A. KUWAIT 3699
[1](#)B. KUWAIT 3585
[1](#)C. KUWAIT 3580

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (S) Summary: During Ambassador's 30-minute conversation with Kuwaiti Prime Minister Shaykh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at Sief Palace August 23, the PM urged the U.S. to heed his advice and engage Iran and Syria. He provided updates on GOK progress in counterterrorism and human trafficking issues. The PM reiterated support for the Palestinian leadership and discussed Sunni participation in the Iraqi constitution-drafting process. He also requested the return of remaining Kuwaiti Gitmo detainees and addressed a GOK anti-corruption campaign. End summary.

Follow up from PM's U.S. Visit: Iran, Syria

[1](#)2. (C) Prime Minister Shaykh Sabah Al-Ahmad, who spoke in English with only occasional help from an interpreter, expressed his pride to have received a warm welcome from the President, Vice President, Secretary of State and other Administration officials during his July 1 U.S. visit. First, the PM reconfirmed his offer made at the White House for Kuwaiti participation in potential refinery construction in the U.S. The de facto ruler of Kuwait then discussed letters he sent to the Iranian and Syrian leaders after his return from Washington. He began the conversation by stating that "the region is not stable. ... We need to have stability for our interests." The PM added that Iran is interfering in southern Iraq and that the threat of potential Iranian nuclear weapons is a "big danger for us." In a conciliatory tone, however, the PM suggested that "we have to talk with them as friends." Ambassador then asked, "But are they listening?" to which Sabah Al-Ahmad responded, "I hope so."

[1](#)3. (C) Regarding new Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the PM repeated a description he provided to local newspapers last week, saying that Ahmadinejad's "wisdom will never allow him to do something" sinister. "Don't blame him," he added, because during the elections every politician says things that he does not mean. "You have to keep trying," the PM urged Ambassador.

[1](#)4. (C) Turning to Syria, the PM said that during GOK discussions with President Bashar Al-Asad, Al-Asad said that he had agreed to comply with any U.S. demands and asked what more was expected. Shaykh Sabah tasked Foreign Minister Shaykh Dr. Mohammed Al-Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah to convey that message during an August 9 meeting with Ambassador (ref C). To date, the PM stated, and repeated several times, the GOK has not received feedback from Washington. He urged the U.S. to provide him additional points to make to Al-Asad.

Strengthening Counterterrorism, Human Trafficking Legislation

¶5. (S/NF) Ambassador praised increased bilateral cooperation between intelligence agencies on counterterrorism issues in the past six months but added that Kuwaiti laws need strengthening to increase penalties and close loopholes in money laundering/terror finance laws. The PM responded that terrorists are not against only the U.S. but against the whole world. Shaykh Sabah was pleased by the enhanced bilateral cooperation.

¶6. (C) Regarding trafficking in persons (TIP), Ambassador highlighted the need for Kuwait to bolster the legal framework regarding the treatment of domestic workers. The PM said that some people do not care about other human beings but that the Government is "serious" about this issue. "You will see this in the coming months," he reported. With respect to Kuwait's Tier 3 rating, the worst category in the annual TIP Report, the PM emphatically stated, "Believe me, we are not on the bottom." According to the PM, Kuwait sent two widebody aircraft full of repatriated trafficking victims, one to Indonesia and one to the Philippines, in ¶2004. Ambassador noted the need to offer alternatives short of deportation.

Regional Issues: Palestinians, Iraq

¶7. (C) In response to Ambassador's request for the GOK to expedite donations to the Palestinians, Shaykh Sabah reported that the GOK transferred funds after the Arab League meeting in Algeria (ref B). The PM reported that Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas recently called him to schedule a visit to Kuwait. The PM said that Abbas is welcome in the emirate anytime and that further aid would be discussed at that time. Shaykh Sabah spoke positively of Abbas but cautioned, "God help him...not from the Israelis but from the Palestinians."

¶8. (C) While discussing the new Iraqi constitution, the PM blamed the news media for fostering negative sentiment against the Sunnis. He believes the media are mischaracterizing the Sunnis and are not allowing them to present their viewpoint. According to the PM, the Iraqi Sunnis want to accept the new constitution but are afraid. He said that he is surprised by the number of ex-regime Iraqis in Jordan, including one of Saddam Hussein's daughters who plans to launch a satellite news station. The PM added that Saddam sent a letter for public release via the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) even though they are not permitted to carry politically-related messages. (Note: August 21 media reports indicate the note was censored by detaining authorities prior to delivery to the ICRC. End note.)

Gitmo: Send the Kuwaitis Home

¶9. (S) The PM spoke frankly about the GOK's position regarding Kuwaiti detainees at Guantanamo. "I am not happy," he said, "that you sent us only one prisoner." Shaykh Sabah mentioned that multiple detainees had been returned to Saudi Arabia and other countries, but Kuwait only received one. Kuwaitis are asking why, he reported, after everything that Kuwait has done for the U.S (ref A). In his words, the continued detentions are creating more hatred for the U.S. among the detainees' family and friends. He urged that the next four scheduled for release should happen in weeks, not months. "Send us all of them. We know how to take care of them," he said.

Priorities for the Fall

¶10. (C) When asked about legislative priorities for the fall, the PM expressed his confidence that the GOK has secured enough votes to authorize Project Kuwait, a major expansion of northern oil fields employing foreign companies' expertise. Ambassador noted the GOK's announcement of a large-scale anti-corruption campaign. Shaykh Sabah said, "we want to see where corruption is and stop it." He added that

the Government will follow corruption trails wherever they may lead.

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